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2006

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Edmonds, Radcliffe G., III. "To Sit in Solemn Silence? *Thronosis* in Ritual, Myth, and Iconography." *American Journal of Philology* 127, no. 3 (2006): 347-366.

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To Sit in Solemn Silence? *Thronosis* in Ritual, Myth, and Iconography*

In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the old man Strepsiades, who wishes to learn from Socrates how to cheat his creditors, is made to put on a wreath and to sit on a bed, while Socrates anoints him in preparation for the epiphany of the Cloud goddesses. The initiation of Strepsiades into the Phrontisterion of Socrates clearly draws upon mystery rituals familiar to Aristophanes' audience, but the debate over the exact rites parodied goes back to the scholia. Among modern scholars, Albrecht Dieterich's assertion that the rites are Orphic not Eleusinian was influentially reprised by Jane Harrison, and still has adherents today.¹ Pierre Bonnechere has recently made a case for the similarities with the oracle of Trophonius, but Strepsiades' ordeal has perhaps most often been taken to be a parody of Eleusinian ritual, especially since the influential work of Burkert.²

To explain Strepsiades' initiation, recent scholars such as Marianetti 1993, Bowie 1993, and Lada-Richards 1999, following the lead of Burkert 1983, have referred to a *thronosis* ritual at the Eleusinian mysteries to describe the process, depicted in a few Roman reliefs, wherein the initiate sits with head covered on a stool.³ Marianetti, for example, cites Burkert's account of *thronosis* at Eleusis to argue that, while the scene might have evoked several different mystery rites for the audience, only the Eleusinian Mysteries have all the components in the Aristophanean scene, and that therefore the scene should be interpreted as a parody of Athens' most sacred mysteries.

Such an idea is the result of a terminological confusion over different types of "enthronement". Although the ritual action of sitting on some sort of seat has its place in a number

¹ Dieterich 1893 = 1911, followed by Harrison 1991 (1903) and Guthrie 1952. More recently, cp. Freyburger-Galland 1992 (and 1986).

² cp. Bonnechere 1998 and 2003 for Trophonius. For Eleusis, see Dover 1968, p. 130; Burkert 1983, pp. 268-9; Byl 1980, 1988, 1994; Marianetti 1993, pp. 18-19; Bowie 1993; Lada-Richards 1999, p. 249 n.63.

³ As Marianetti explains it: "The actual initiation ceremony is threefold: (1) Strepsiades sits on a *ἱερὸν σκίμποδα* (enthronement, 254), (2) he is crowned with a *στέφανον* (coronation, 255) and (3) he is sprinkled with *τρίμμη παμπάλη* (baptism, 260)." Marianetti 1993, p. 18, who cites Dover 1968 p. 130. For the reliefs see LIMC Ceres 145, 146, and 147, as well as the discussion of the history of their interpretation by Kinney 1994.

of different rituals, the term *thronosis* properly belongs to Korybantic initiation ritual, not to the Eleusinian Mysteries. Not only are the terms employed to describe the rituals different, but the iconographic representations of the ritual and the mythic paradigms are different as well. The purificatory silent sitting of the Eleusinian initiate should not be confused with the bewildering and terrifying treatment of the enthroned initiate in a Korybantic initiation. Whatever parallels with the Eleusinian mysteries may exist in the rest of Aristophanes' scenes, Strepsiades' enthronement in the *Clouds* bears little resemblance to the solemn, silent sitting of Demeter in the *Hymn* or even of Herakles in the Roman reliefs. On the contrary, like the initiands in the Korybantic *thronosis*, Strepsiades anxiously awaits the arrival of a chorus of supernatural beings, uncertain whether he is being prepared to be initiated or killed. Obviously, Aristophanes' portrait of Socrates has a different resonance if he is depicted as purveying the ecstatic rites of foreign (even if relatively familiar) cults in Athens than if he is shown making a mockery of the Eleusinian Mysteries.⁴ By assuming that the testimonies to *thronosis* apply to the Eleusinian Mysteries, Marianetti and others who follow Burkert misread the tenor of Aristophanes' portrait of Socrates and its effect on his audience. Beyond the basic importance of terminological accuracy, keeping the types of enthronement ritual separate is particularly important when analyzing other texts for allusions to Eleusinian rituals and using these allusions to try to reconstruct the rituals of the Mysteries.

Plato, in the *Euthydemus* 277de, uses the term *thronosis* to describe an initiation ritual in which the initiand is seated in a throne while the initiators dance wildly and confusingly around him. The young Clinias has been bewildered by the patter of the sophists Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and Socrates reassures him that such confusing verbal gyrations are merely the sophistic equivalent of a Korybantic initiation ritual.

⁴ The differences have been discussed by, e.g., Harrison 1991 (1903), pp. 511-515, Adkins 1970, de Vries 1973,

Kleinias, you shouldn't be surprised if the arguments seem unusual to you. For perhaps you don't perceive what sort of thing these two strangers are doing with you. They are doing just the same thing as those in the rite of the Korybantes do, when they perform the enthronement ceremony with the one who is about to be initiated. In that situation too there is some dancing and playing around, as you know if you have been initiated. And these two now are doing nothing other than dancing around you and the sort of playful cavorting, as if they were going to initiate you afterwards. So now, just imagine that you are hearing the preliminaries of the sophistic rites.⁵

Burkert and others have used Plato's term (and Plato's imagery) to describe the ritual at Eleusis that involves the initiand sitting down. Burkert envisions the psychological effect of the ceremony on the initiand: "Blind, helpless, and abandoned, the candidate must suffer the unknown. He is captive and ignorant, surrounded by those who are active and knowing."⁶ The active initiators in Burkert's description allude to the cavorting Korybantes in Plato's description, dancing around the bewildered initiand who does not yet know what their activity portends for him. Since the ritual at Eleusis involves the act of "sitting on a seat", Burkert uses the term from Plato to refer it.

A search of the corpus of Greek literature in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, however, reveals that *thronosis* is actually a very rare word. Apart from Plato's use of the term, which explicitly refers to Korybantic ritual, the only other uses are in Hesychius and in the Sibylline oracles (8.43-9). The Hesychius entry for *thronosis*: "the beginning of the rite for the initiands," seems merely to be a gloss on the Plato passage.⁷ The mysteries that the initiands are beginning to undergo are not specified, but there is no reason to suppose that Hesychius is not referring to the Korybantic ritual to which

Marianetti 1993.

⁵Plato *Enthydemus* 277d ὦ Κλεινία, μὴ θαύμαζε εἰ σοι φαίνονται ἀήθεις οἱ λόγοι. ἴσως γὰρ οὐκ αἰσθάνη οἷον ποιεῖτον τῷ ξένῳ περὶ σέ· ποιεῖτον δὲ ταῦτόν ὅπερ οἱ ἐν τῇ τελετῇ τῶν Κορυβάντων, ὅταν τὴν θρόνωνσιν ποιῶσιν περὶ τοῦτον ὃν ἂν μέλλωσι τελεῖν. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ χορεία τις ἐστὶ καὶ παιδιὰ, εἰ ἄρα καὶ τετέλεσαι· καὶ νῦν τούτῳ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ χορεύετον περὶ σέ καὶ οἷον ὀρχεῖσθον παίζοντε, ὥς μετὰ τοῦτο τελοῦντε. νῦν οὖν νόμισον τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ἱερῶν ἀκούειν τῶν σοφιστικῶν. Socrates' off-hand reference to the Korybantic rituals makes it clear that these rituals were well known enough in Athens that the details (that modern historians would most like to learn) need not be supplied for the audience. cp. Linforth 1946, pp. 124-5.

⁶Burkert 1983, p.268. cp., Bowie 1993, pp. 247-8, 252 and Lada-Richards 1999, pp. 248-9, with description and reference to Plato's *Enthydemus* 277 on p. 101.

⁷Hesychius 779 1 θρόνωσις· καταρχή περὶ τοὺς μουμένους.

Plato is referring. The Eleusinian Mysteries are surely not the only ritual in which the initiands could be referred to as *muomenoi*; on the contrary, the participle would be the natural term for anyone in the process of undergoing initiation in any mystery.

The Christian-influenced Sibylline Oracles passage locates the ritual of *thronosis* on Crete. "What sort of god will save you, golden or stone or bronze? Or where then are your assembly decrees? Where the tribe of Rhea or Kronos or Zeus and all the rest, whom you revered, soulless demons, shades of the faded dead, whose tombs ill-fated Crete will have as a boast, celebrating enthronement for the senseless dead."⁸ The passage is part of a Christian polemic against pagan rituals as worship of the dead, dead heroes and dead gods, in contrast to the Living God advocated by the Christian poet who is adopting the name of a great pagan prophetic authority. The mention of Crete presumably is meant to allude to a Kouretic ritual similar to the Korybantic one described by Plato, since the vigorous dancers on Crete akin to the Phrygian Korybantes were called Kouretes.

Even the related word *thronismos* appears seldom and never in a specifically Eleusinian context. Proclus uses the term to refer to the *thronosis* mentioned in the *Euthydemus*.⁹ Dio Chrysostom (II.33-34) uses the term to describe an initiation ritual full of wild dancing around a wondering initiand, who gazes in amazement at the figures whirling around him: "Just as they are accustomed to do in the ritual called enthronement, the initiators (οἱ τελοῦντες), having enthroned the initiands (τοὺς μουμένους), dance in circles around them." For Dio, the awe and wonder caused by this ritual with whirling initiators is like the awe and wonder caused by the spectacle of the cosmos, with the stars and planets whirling and dancing around.¹⁰

⁸ Sibylline Oracles 8.43-49. ποῦός σε θεὸς διασώσει, χρυσοῦς ἢ λίθινος ἢ χάλκεος; ἢ τότε ποῦ σοι δόγματα συγκλήτου; ποῦ Ῥείης ἢ Κρόνιοι ἢ Διὸς γενεὴ καὶ πάντων, ὧν ἐσεβάσθης, δαίμονας ἀψύχους, νεκρῶν εἰδῶλα καμόντων, ὧν Κρήτη καύχημα τάφους ἢ δύσμορος ἔξει, θρησκεύουσα θρόνωνσιν ἀναισθήτοις νεκύεσσιν.

⁹ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica*, 6.65.23.

¹⁰ Dio Chrysostom Oration 12.33-34 σχεδὸν οὖν ὅμοιον ὥσπερ εἴ τις ἄνδρα Ἑλλήνα ἢ βάρβαρον μυοίη παραδούς εἰς μυστικὸν τινα οἶκον ὑπερφυῇ κάλλει καὶ μεγέθει, πολλὰ μὲν ὀρώντα μυστικὰ

A spell requesting a dream oracle in one of the Greek Magical Papyri makes reference to the magician having undergone a *thronismos* ritual, but no details of the ritual or its context are mentioned.¹¹ The only other uses of *thronismos* in the corpus that appear to refer to any kind of mystery ritual are in entries in the Suda, listing works by the poets Orpheus and Pindar. *Thronismoi Metrooi*, enthronements in the rituals of the Mother of the Gods, and *Bacchica*, Bacchic ritual songs, are said to have been composed by a certain Nikios the Eleatic under the pseudonym of Orpheus.¹² That such works are not exclusively the province of the Orphic pseudepigrapha is shown by the attribution of *Enthronismoi* and *Bacchica* to the poet Pindar, along with his victory odes for the Olympic and Pythian games and his various hymns, skolia, threnodies, encomia, etc.¹³

The few later references in the corpus to *enthronismos* seem to have other meanings. Proclus (*in Remp.* 2.249.8) uses the term to describe the Fates sitting down upon thrones in Plato's myth of

θεάματα, πολλῶν δὲ ἀκούοντα τοιούτων φωνῶν, σκότους τε καὶ φωτὸς ἐναλλάξ αὐτῷ φαινόμενων, ἄλλων τε μυρίων γιγνομένων, ἔτι δὲ (εἰ) καθάπερ εἰώθασιν ἐν τῷ καλουμένῳ θρονισμῷ καθίσαντες τοὺς μουμένους οἱ τελοῦντες κύκλῳ περιχορεύειν· ἄρα γε τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦτον μηδὲν παθεῖν εἰκὸς τῇ ψυχῇ μηδ' ὑπονοῆσαι τὰ γιγνόμενα, ὥς μετὰ γνώμης καὶ παρασκευῆς πράττεται σοφωτέρας ... ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ὁμοίων τοῖς τελομένοις, ἀλλὰ θεῶν ἀθανάτων θνητοὺς τελούντων, νυκτὶ τε καὶ ἡμέρᾳ (καὶ φωτὶ καὶ ἄστροις), εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν, ἀτεχνῶς περιχορευόντων αἰεὶ. "So it is just as if someone were to initiate a man, Greek or barbarian, leading him into some mystic shrine overwhelming in its size and beauty. He would see many mystic spectacles and hear many such voices; light and darkness would appear to him in alternation, and a myriad of other things would happen. Still more, just as they are accustomed to do in the ritual called enthronement, the initiators, having enthroned the initiands, dance in circles around them. Is it at all likely that this man would experience nothing in his soul and that he would not suspect that what was taking place was done with a wiser understanding and preparation? ... Still more, if, not humans like the initiands, but immortal gods were initiating mortals, and night and day, both in the light and under the stars were, if it is right to speak so, literally dancing around them eternally." Posidonius, fr. 368, reproduces this passage.

¹¹ PGM VII.740-750. Ὀνειραιτητόν. γράψον εἰς π(τ)ύχιον κασσιτέρινον καὶ ἐπιστεφανώσας μύρτοις τὸ πτύχιον θές τὸ θυμιατήριον. ἐπίθου δὲ λίβανον καὶ περιένεγκον λέγων περὶ τὴν ἀτμί(δ)α τὸ πέταλον· "κύριοι θεοί, χρηματίσατέ μοι περὶ τοῦ δεῖνα πράγματος ταύτη τῇ νυκτὶ, ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις ὥραις) πάντως δέομαι, ἱκετεύω, δοῦλος ὑμέτερος καὶ τεθρονισμένος ὑμῖν." ἔπειτα θεὶς ὑπὸ τὸ προκεφάλαιον τὸ π(τ)ύχιν κοιμῶ, μηδενὶ δοὺς ἀπόκρισιν, ἀγνεύσας ἡμέρας γ'. Dream request: write on a strip of tin and, having crowned the strip with myrtle, set up the censer. Offer up the frankincense and carry the metal leaf around the smoke saying: "Lord gods, prophesy to me regarding the NN matter on this night, in the coming hours. Wholly I beseech you, I supplicate, I your servant and enthroned by you." Then, putting the strip under your pillow, go to sleep, giving answer to no one and having kept yourself pure for three days.

¹² Suda (654.) Ὀρφεύς ... ἔγραψε ... Θρονισμοὺς Μητρώους καὶ Βακχικά· ταῦτα Νικίου τοῦ Ἐλεάτου φασὶν εἶναι.

¹³ P,1617 - Πίνδαρος ... ἔγραψε δὲ ἐν βιβλίοις ἱζ' Δωρίδι διαλέκτῳ ταῦτα· Ὀλυμπιονίκας, Πυθιονίκας, Προσόδια, Παρθένια, Ἐνθρονισμούς, Βακχικά, Δαφνηφορικά, Παιᾶνας,

Er, but does not pursue any ritual parallel in his exegesis. Other later references to *enthronismos* seem to be referring to the seating of Christian bishops and have nothing to do with pagan ritual, Korybantic or otherwise.¹⁴

In every case in which there is a description of the ritual, the ritual of enthronement described by *thronosis* or *thronismos* entails a vigorous dancing around the initiate, who is bewildered by the treatment. Such dancing is characteristic of the Korybantes and the various other similar mythical groups of wild dancers, such as the Kouretes. Strabo's analysis remains the best source. He notes that, for the most part, the Kouretes are associated with Crete and the Korybantes with Phrygia:

So great is the complexity in these accounts that, while some represent the Korybantes and Kabeiroi and Idaian Dactyls and Telchines as the same as the Kouretes, others make them kin with one another and distinguish certain small differences from one another. But, roughly speaking and on the whole, they represent them all as a kind of people inspired and in a bacchic frenzy, who, by armed dances and clamor and noise and cymbals and drums and weapons, and also by flute and shouting, are terrifying in the sacred rites in the role of ministers.¹⁵

Thus, sometimes the dancers are called Kouretes or even Kabeiroi instead of Korybantes, but the type of ritual remains the same, an ecstatic dance to the sound of pipes and drums which creates a frenzied and terrifying display. A variety of depictions of such dances survive from antiquity, showing dancers with shields and weapons dancing around a central point, often clearly a throne, a

Ὑπορχήματα, Ὕμνους, Διθυράμβους, Σκολιά, Ἐγκώμια, Θρήνους, δράματα τραγικὰ ἰζ', ἐπιγράμματα ἐπικά καὶ καταλογάδην παραινέσεις τοῖς Ἑλλήσι, καὶ ἄλλα πλεῖστα.

¹⁴ Synesius, *Epistulae*, 67.103; Nicephorus Gregoras, *Historia Romana*, 3.246.10; *Concilia Oecumenica* (ACO), *Concilium universale Chalcedonense anno 451*, 2,1,3: 30.1.;49, 22; Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4.22.1; Photius Epistle 324.

¹⁵ Strabo 10.3.7. τοσαύτη δ' ἐστὶν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις ποικιλία, τῶν μὲν τοὺς αὐτοὺς τοῖς Κουρήσι τοὺς Κορύβαντας καὶ Καβεῖρους καὶ Ἰδαίους δακτύλους καὶ Τελχῖνας ἀποφαινόντων, τῶν δὲ συγγενεῖς ἀλλήλων καὶ μικράς τινας αὐτῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφορὰς διαστελλομένων, ὥς δὲ τύπῳ εἰπεῖν καὶ κατὰ τὸ πλεόν, ἅπαντας ἐνθουσιαστικούς τινας καὶ βακχικούς καὶ ἐνοπλίῳ κινήσει μετὰ θορύβου καὶ ψόφου καὶ κυμβάλων καὶ τυμπάνων καὶ ὅπλων, ἔτι δ' αὐλοῦ καὶ βοῆς ἐκπλήττοντας κατὰ τὰς ἱερουργίας ἐν σχήματι διακόνων.

child, or an enthroned child.¹⁶ <<illustration – LIMC Kouretes/Korybantes 21>> Plato's

testimony makes it clear that, in ritual, the dance circles around the enthroned initiand.



The myths surrounding these figures provide an insight into the circumstances of their dance.¹⁷ The Kouretes were said to have been employed by Rhea to dance noisily outside the cave in which the infant Zeus was hidden, drowning out his baby noises so that his father Kronos would not be able to locate and devour this infant as he had his previous offspring.¹⁸ Zeus' cave where the Kouretes danced was said to be on Mount Ida in Crete, but the Korybantes were similarly associated with Rhea or the Mother of the Gods on Mount Ida in Phrygia. While the origins and evolution of these various groups have been discussed from Strabo on, that they were fairly well syncretized with each other and with Bacchic cults in the fifth century is shown by the chorus in Euripides' *Bacchae*,

¹⁶ cp. LIMC Kouretes/Korybantes 3, a bronze coin from Mesambria, or LIMC 15, a marble relief from Sorrento. In the frieze from the theater at Pergamum, LIMC 31 a & b, one can see the remains of a lion-footed throne in the center of the dancers. In LIMC 21, a relief on the armored torso of a statue, the dancers circle around a child, and, in LIMC 33, a bronze coin from Magnesia, there is a cista mystica next to the child.

¹⁷ The relation of myth to ritual is never as direct and straightforward as some interpreters of myth have claimed, and the attempt to reconstruct a ritual from a myth is always fraught with difficulty. Even in the rare cases, such as the evidence of Harpokration (below) that a certain ritual is an imitation of the events of a particular myth, we cannot know for certain all the details of the ritual, much less what the significance or function of the ritual was. Most of the time, moreover, the myth and ritual merely make use of similar traditional elements - the names of gods and heroes or the pattern of an infant threatened by his protectors - for a variety of different purposes and effects. The attempt of interpreters such as, e.g., Harrison 1991 or Robertson 2003, to reduce myth to a simple verbal reflection of ritual action not only drastically oversimplifies the complex ways in which myth can make use of these traditional elements, but it also locks the rituals into fixed forms on the presumption that the ritual never shifts or adapts to changing times and circumstances.

¹⁸ Kallimachos *Hymn to Zeus* 1.51-53; Apollodorus *Bibl.* 1.1.6-7; Diodorus Siculus 5.65; Strabo 10.3.11.

which invokes the Kouretes and the triple-helmeted Korybantes and their revelry mixed with the songs of the bacchic women and the trieteric festivals of Dionysos.¹⁹

Indeed, while the names of the characters involved are subject to great variation, the plotline of the myth remains relatively constant. Whether they be the Korybantes, the Kouretes, or even the Telchines or Dactyls, a group of adult (or perhaps ephebic) males are set to protect an infant god, be it Zeus or Dionysos or even Poseidon or Apollo. Pausanias (5.7.6) tells us that Rhea entrusted baby Zeus to the Dactyls, while Diodorus Siculus (5.55.1-3) relates that Rhea gave the infant Poseidon to the Telchines to escape Kronos.

A similar pattern of threatened child and band of youths emerges in other myths, although with some significant variations. Whereas for one generation of gods, father Kronos is the great threat, in the next generation, stepmother Hera provides the danger against which the baby must be protected. Strabo also relates that the Kouretes hid Leto and the infant Apollo and Artemis from the jealousy of Hera.²⁰ Not only does Hera threaten many of Zeus' offspring by other women in a wide variety of ways, but she plays the villain in the tale (much beloved by the Neoplatonists as an

¹⁹ Cp. the discussion in Gantz 1993, pp. 147-8. Euripides, *Bacchae* 120-135, ὃ θαλάμευμα Κουρήτων ζάθεοί τε Κρήτας Διογενέτορες ἑναυλοῖ, ἔνθα τρικύρουθες ἄντροις βυρσότονον κύκλωμα τόδε μοι Κορύβαντες ἡῦρον· βακχεῖα δ' ἀνὰ συντόνῳ κέρασαν ἀδυβόα Φρυγίων αὐλῶν πνεύματι ματρός τε Ῥέας ἐς χέρα θῆκαν, κτύπον εὐάσμασι Βακχᾶν· παρὰ δὲ μαινόμενοι Σάτυροι ματέρος ἐξανύσαντο θεᾶς, ἐς δὲ χορεύματα συνῆψαν τριετηρίδων, αἷς χαίρει Διόνυσος. O chamber of the Kouretes and divine Zeus-bearing Cretan halls, wherein the triple-helmeted Korybantes in their caves invented this circle of stretched hide, and in their intense bacchic frenzy mixed it with the sweet-crying breath of Phrygian flutes and put it into the hands of mother Rhea, resounding with the cries of the Bacchae. And nearby frenzied satyrs performed the rites of the mother goddess and linked them to the dances of the trieteric festivals, in which Dionysus rejoices.

²⁰ 14.1.20 ἐνταῦθα γὰρ μυθεύουσι τὴν λοχείαν καὶ τὴν τροφὸν τὴν Ὀρτυγίαν καὶ τὸ ἄδυτον ἐν ᾧ ἡ λοχεία, καὶ τὴν πλησίον ἐλαίαν, ἣν πρῶτον ἐπαναπαύσασθαι φασὶ τὴν θεὸν ἀπολυθεῖσαν τῶν ὠδίνων. ὑπέρκειται δὲ τοῦ ἄλσους ὄρος ὃ Σολμισσός, ὅπου στάντας φασὶ τοὺς Κουρήτας τῷ ψόφῳ τῶν ὀπλῶν ἐκπληῖξαι τὴν Ἥραν ζηλοτύπως ἐφεδρεύουσιν, καὶ λαθεῖν συμπράξαντας τὴν λοχείαν τῇ Λητοῖ. For in that place, as the myth relates, was the birth and the nurse Ortygia and the sacred spot, in which the birth occurred, and the nearby olive tree, by which, they say, the goddess first rested after delivery from her birth pangs. Above the grove lies Mount Solmissos, where they say the Kouretes stationed themselves and with the clamor of weapons terrified Hera, when she jealously lay in wait for Leto, thereby helping Leto conceal the birth.

allegory of the one and the many) of the 'Titans' dismemberment of the infant Dionysos.²¹ As the scandalized early Christian polemics relate, Hera, jealous of the infant Dionysos' status, convinces the Titans to get rid of the baby. "The mysteries of Dionysos are perfectly inhuman. While he was still a child, the Kouretes danced around with clashing arms, and the Titans crept up by stealth and deceived him with childish toys. Then these Titans dismembered Dionysos while he was still an infant."²² Clement's story has two sets of adult male figures, Kouretes and Titans, one as protectors, the other as the threat.

Moreover, in a curious myth related by Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2.1.3), Hera persuades the Kouretes to abandon their guardianship and eggs them on to the abduction of another of Zeus' progeny, Epaphos.

Having departed to Scythia and the Kimmerian land, Io wandered through vast stretches of land and swam through great seas in both Europe and Asia. Finally, she arrived in Egypt, where, having recovered her original form, she gave birth to a son, Epaphos, beside the Nile River. But Hera asked the Kouretes to make away with him, and so they made away with him. And when Zeus discovered this, he killed the Kouretes, and Io went out in search of the child. Having roamed all over Syria (for there, she was informed, the wife of the king of Byblus was nursing her son), she found Epaphos. Returning to Egypt, she married Telegonus, who was then ruling the Egyptians, and set up an image of Demeter, whom the Egyptians call Isis. Io also they likewise call Isis.²³

²¹ cp. Nonnus VI.169-176; Firmicus Maternus *de Err. Prof. Relig.* 6; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.17.2-2.18.2; Arnobius *Adv. Nat.* 5.19; Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* 1.3, 5-6; Damascius, *In Phaed.* 1.4-6, 129; Macrobius *In Somn. Scip.* I.12.11, et al.

²² e.g., Clement *Protr.* 2.17.2 Τὰ γὰρ Διονύσου μυστήρια τέλεον ἀπάνθρωπα· ὃν εἰσέτι παῖδα ὄντα ἐνόπλῳ κινήσει περιχορευόντων Κουρήτων, δόλῳ δὲ ὑποδύντων Τιτάνων, ἀπατήσαντες παιδαριώδεσιν ἀθύρμασιν, οὗτοι δὲ οἱ Τιτᾶνες διέσπασαν, ἔτι νηπίαχον ὄντα. cp., Arnobius *adv. nat.* 5.19

²³ ἀπελθοῦσα δὲ εἰς Σκυθίαν καὶ τὴν Κιμμερίδα γῆν, πολλὴν χέρσον πλανηθεῖσα καὶ πολλὴν διανηξαμένη θάλασσαν Εὐρώπης τε καὶ Ἀσίας, τελευταῖον ἤκεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον, ὅπου τὴν ἀρχαίαν μορφήν ἀπολαβοῦσα γεννᾷ παρὰ τῷ Νείλῳ ποταμῷ Ἐπαφον παῖδα. τοῦτον δὲ Ἥρα δεῖται Κουρήτων ἀφανῆ ποιῆσαι· οἱ δὲ ἠφάνισαν αὐτόν. καὶ Ζεὺς μὲν αἰσθόμενος κτείνει Κούρητας, Ἰὼ δὲ ἐπὶ ζήτησιν τοῦ παιδὸς ἐτράπετο. πλανωμένη δὲ κατὰ τὴν Συρίαν ἄπασαν (ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἐμηνύετο ὅτι ἡ τοῦ Βυβλίων βασιλέως γυνὴ ἐτιθήναι τὸν υἱόν) καὶ τὸν Ἐπαφον εὐροῦσα, εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐλθοῦσα ἐγαμήθη Τηλεγόνῳ τῷ βασιλεύοντι τότε Αἰγυπτίων. ἰδρύσατο δὲ ἄγαλμα Δήμητρος, ἣν ἐκάλεσαν Ἰσιν Αἰγύπτιοι, καὶ τὴν Ἰὼ Ἰσιν ὁμοίως προσηγόρευσαν. Another indication of the interchangeability of Kouretes and Titans is that Hyginus *Fab.* 150 has Juno incite the Titans to revolt against Jupiter in the Titanomachia because of her anger about Epaphus being given royal power in Egypt.

A similar shift of the protectors to the threat occurs in some of the versions of Dionysos' murder by the Titans. As Firmicus Maternus relates the tale, Hera (or rather here Juno) corrupted the guardians of the infant Liber left by his father Jove and introduced as guards her followers (*satellites*), the Titans, who proceeded to tear the baby to bits.²⁴ A late antique ivory pyxis²⁵ illustrating the life of Dionysos provides a clear illustration of the scene in which the infant, seated on a throne is distracted before the murder by the armored dancers who whirl around him. Although the myths would lead us to expect the Titans as his assailants, the iconography reveals their identity with the Kouretes or Korybantes. <<illustration – LIMC Bacchus 267>>



²⁴ Iulius Firmicus Maternus *De Err. Profan. Relig.* 6 Liber itaque Iovis fuit filius, regis scilicet Cretici, hic cum fuisset adultera matre progenitus, nutriebatur apud patrem studiosus quam decebat. uxor Iovis cui Iononi fuit nomen, novercalis animi furore commota ad necem infantis omnifariam parabat insidias. proficiscens peregre pater quia indignationes tacitas sciebat uxoris, ne quid ab irata muliere dolo fieret, idoneis sicut sibi videbatur custodibus tutelam credidit filii. tunc Iuno opportunum insidiarum nanta tempus, et ex hoc fortius inflammata, quia proficiscens pater et sellam regni puero tradiderat et sceptrum, custodes primum regalibus praemiis muneribusque corripit, deinde satellites suos qui Titanes vocabantur, in interioribus regiae locat partibus, et crepundiis ac speculo adfabre facto animos ita pueriles inlexit, ut desertis regis sedibus ad insidiarum locus puerilis animi desiderio duceretur. Liber was the son of Jove, a king of Crete. Considering that he was born out of wedlock, his father's attentions to him were excessive. The wife of Jove, whose name was Juno, was filled with a stepmother's anger and sought in every way by guile to bring about the death of the child. Now the father was setting out on a journey, and because he knew of the concealed displeasure of his wife, and in order to prevent her from acting treacherously in her fury, he entrusted the care of his son to guards who in his opinion were to be trusted. Juno, being thus given an opportune moment for her crime, and with fuel added to her rage through the circumstance that the father had on his departure handed over to the boy his throne and his sceptre, first of all corrupted the guardians with royal payments and gifts, then stationed her followers, called Titans, in the inner part of the palace, and with the aid of rattles and a mirror of ingenious workmanship so

In these tales, the group of older men who might be expected to protect the infant suddenly turns on the baby and attempt to harm him.²⁶ Such a mythic model is particularly appropriate for the context of an initiation ritual, where the initiand does not know what to expect of his initiators. Perhaps this terrifying frenzied display is merely apotropaic, warding off harm from the initiate during this transition, but perhaps not. Perhaps the ecstatic fury of the dance will be turned upon the initiand, who will be torn to pieces by the crowd around him.

The mythic precedent usually cited for the ritual connected with Eleusis, on the contrary, has an entirely different affect. In the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (197-201), Demeter sits on a fleece-covered stool in solemn silence, mourning the loss of Persephone. She fasts and refuses drink until she takes the sacred *kykeon*.

But reverence and awe and pale fear seized Metaneira, and she arose from her seat and left it open to be sat upon. But Demeter, bringer of seasons, the gift giver, was not willing to be seated upon the bright seat but remained silent, casting down her beautiful eyes, until careful Iambe set up a jointed seat for her and threw down over it a silvery fleece. Then, sitting down on it, Demeter held up her veil with her hands. Long she sat there on the stool, voiceless in her sorrow, nor did she greet anyone by word or by act, but, without smiling or tasting of food or drink, she pined away with longing for her deep-bosomed daughter.²⁷

distracted his childish mind that he left his royal seat and was brought to the place of ambush, led there by the irrational impulse of childhood. (trans. Guthrie, W.K.C., *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1952., pp. 108-9)

²⁵ LIMC Dionysos/Bacchus 130=176=267. From the Palagi collection in Bologna - Mus. Civ. Pal. 693.

²⁶ Herodotus' tale of Cypselus (5.92) doubtless partakes of this same pattern, where the infant's Bacchiad relatives come to do away with the baby prophesied to overthrow the family's rule in Corinth. cp. Pausanias' tale of the infant Dionysos cast adrift in a chest and nursed by the people of Brasiae, who have a temples with Korybantes at the point where the god was washed ashore (3.24.3-5) A similar ambiguity with a group of females occurs in some stories of Dionysos, where the nymphs who are nursing the baby turn into raving maenads, becoming the threat rather than the protection. cp. Nonnus IX.25-55. Sometimes Ino alone represents the nurse turned maenad who threatens a baby, as in tales of Melicertes.

²⁷Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* 190-201. τὴν δ' αἰδῶς τε σέβας τε ἰδὲ χλωρὸν δέος εἶλεν· εἶξε δέ οἱ κλισμοῖο καὶ ἐδριάσθαι ἄνωγεν. ἀλλ' οὐ Δημήτηρ ὠρηφόρος, ἀγλαόδωρος, ἤθελεν ἐδριάσθαι ἐπὶ κλισμοῖο φαεινοῦ, ἀλλ' ἀκέουσ' ἀνέμιμνε κατ' ὄμματα καλὰ βαλοῦσα, πρίν γ' ὅτε δὴ οἱ ἔθηκεν Ἰάμβη κέδν' εἰδυῖα πηκτὸν ἔδος, καθύπερθε δ' ἐπ' ἀργύφειον βάλε κῶας. ἔνθα καθεζομένη προκατέσχετο χερσὶ καλύπτρην· δηρὸν δ' ἄφθογγος τετιμημένη ἦστ' ἐπὶ δίφρου, οὐδέ τιν' οὔτ' ἔπει προσπτύσσετο οὔτε τι ἔργω, ἀλλ' ἀγέλαστος, ἄπαστος ἐδητύος ἡδὲ ποτῆτος ἦστο πόθῳ μινύθουσα βαθυζώνοιο θυγατρὸς.

Although no textual evidence actually confirms that it was part of the ritual, such a period of silent mourning might be appropriate as an initial purificatory step in the mysteries.²⁸

The iconography of a few Roman era depictions of an initiation of Heracles suggests that such a ritual may perhaps have been part of an Eleusinian festival. Representations on the Torre Nova Sarcophagus (LIMC Ceres 146), the Lovatelli Urn (LIMC Ceres 145), and a fragment of terracotta also from the Lovatelli collection (LIMC Ceres 147) show an initiate, probably Herakles, seated on a stool with a covered head. <<illustrations – LIMC Ceres 145 & 146>>



²⁸ Burkert 1983, p. 268 takes the passage in the Hymn as confirmation that the the Eleusinian Mysteries included a *thronosis*. Richardson 1974, pp. 22, 211-213, claims that the scene provides the cult *aition* for the preliminary purification.

This initiate is at times being purified with by a figure holding a liknon (LIMC Ceres 145, 147) or torch (LIMC Ceres 146).²⁹ Such a purificatory ritual may have been part of the Lesser Mysteries at Agrai, which prepared the initiates for the Greater Mysteries held at Eleusis, since the Lesser Mysteries were said to have been first established for the purification of Heracles, to permit that much-bloodstained foreigner to participate in the Eleusinian rites.³⁰ However, since the Lesser Mysteries seem to have no longer been performed in Roman times, it is uncertain how the ritual purification in these depictions actually fit in with the Eleusinian Mysteries as they were performed in the Classical period.³¹ In any case, such a purificatory ritual, even if it involved the initiand solemnly sitting on a fleece-covered stool in imitation of the mourning Demeter, cannot be termed a *thronosis* in the sense it is attested.³² None of the representations show dancing figures, nor could an initiand with covered head be bewildered by unseen gyrations. The "enthronement" at Eleusis is a

²⁹ As Servius points out in his commentaries on Aeneid 6.741 and Georgics 1.165, the torch and the winnowing fan (liknon) symbolized purification by fire or by air.

Georgics 1.165 - Id est cribrum areale. *Mystica* autem *Iacchi* ideo ait quod Liberi Patris sacra ad purgationem animae pertinebant: et sic homines eius Mysteriis purgabantur, sicut vannis frumenta purgantur.

[Aeneid 6.741] aliae panduntur inanes suspensae ad ventos loquitur quidem poetice de purgatione animarum, tangit tamen quod et philosophi dicunt. nam triplex est omnis purgatio. aut enim in terra purgantur quae nimis oppressae sordibus fuerint, deditae scilicet corporalibus blandimentis, id est transeunt in corpora terrena: et hae igni dicuntur purgari; ignis enim ex terra est quo exuruntur omnia, nam caelestis nihil perurit: aut in aqua, id est transeunt in corpora marina, si paulo melius vixerint: aut certe in aëre, transeundo scilicet in aëria corpora, si satis bene vixerint. quod in Statio legimus, ubi de auguriis tractat. unde etiam in sacris omnibus tres sunt istae purgationes: nam aut taeda purgant et sulphure, aut aqua abluunt, aut aere ventilant, quod erat in sacris Liberi: hoc est enim tibi que oscilla ex alta suspendunt mollia pinu; nam genus erat purgationis. et in ipsis purgationibus bonum meritum secutus est ordinem, ut ante aëriam, inde aquae, post ignis diceret purgationem.

³⁰ Diod. Sic. 4.14.3; Aristoph. *Ran.* 501, *Plut.* 845, 1013.

³¹ A 3rd century BCE relief from Rhodes, possibly from the tomb of the peripatetic Hieronymus, has a similar depiction of a torch-bearing female behind a seated figure, but it difficult to determine the identity or even gender of the seated figure. A veiled female figure rises from the ground in front of the seated figure, making the identification with Kore's return tempting but unprovable. Even with such an earlier date, however, the connection of the imagery with the Eleusinian mysteries as they were practiced in the Classical period remains uncertain. For a discussion of the relief (with images) and its context, see Matelli 2004.

³² While the sacrifice of a pig and the attributes of some of the other figures do suggest an Eleusinian setting, Herakles' purification on the reliefs also differs in some significant ways from Demeter's silent sitting. Although both have their heads covered, the fleece in Herakles' purification, the *δελός κώδιον*, is under his left foot and he sits on his characteristic lion skin, whereas Demeter sits on the fleece. Hesychius defines the *δελός κώδιον*: They use this expression when the victim has been sacrificed to Zeus, and those who were being purified stood on it with their left foot. For further discussion of the purification in the reliefs, see Kinney 1994, esp. pp. 78-86, and Clinton 2003, esp. pp. 50-60.

calm and solemn ritual of purification, in contrast to the terrifying dance around the initiate in the Korybantic *thronosis*.

Aristophanes' parody ritual in the *Clouds*, then, cannot, at least in this respect, be drawing on a ritual of sitting from the Eleusinian Mysteries. Strepsiades does not sit in solemn silence with his head covered while he is purified; on the contrary, he anxiously watches Socrates' antics and only covers his head when the Clouds appear later. The σκίμπους on which he sits is a characteristically Aristophanic substitution of a cheap, quotidian thing for the high ritual item. Whatever kind of seat it may be precisely, it is at any rate neither the kind of seat covered with fleece on which Demeter and Herakles sit nor a formal throne of the kind used in the Korybantic-type of initiation.

What makes the scene resemble the Korybantic initiation of Plato's description is the atmosphere of (comic) terror and confusion, instead of (mock) sombre solemnity. Strepsiades' anxiety over being sacrificed, as Dover points out *ad loc*, cannot be motivated simply by receiving a garland, since this adornment was standard festival wear for celebrants, whereas sacrificial animals were seldom, if ever, given such crowns. Strepsiades, like the Korybantic initiate in ritual or the infant god in the myths, is unsure whether he is about to be given a special protection or a special execution. His allusion to being sacrificed like Athamas has puzzled commentators since the scholia, but, whatever version of the myth lies behind the remark, it seems clear that the scene includes Athamas moving from the role of celebrant to sacrificial victim before being rescued.³³ This blurring of roles again recalls the Korybantic myths, and it may be relevant that Athamas is involved in a series of twisted child sacrifices and near-sacrifices that are linked with the tales of

³³ While some of the scholiasts see the joke as Strepsiades being such a rube (ἄγροικος) that he mixes up the sacrificer Athamas with the sacrificed Phrixus, others claim that Sophokles set a scene of Athamas about to be sacrificed after the escape of Phrixus in one of his lost Athamas plays. See Dover's discussion *ad loc*, pp. 132-3, as well as Byl 1994, pp. 44-6.

Dionysos' infancy.³⁴ Because his wife Ino is the nurse of the infant Dionysos, Athamas is driven mad by Hera and slays his son Learchos, thinking he is a wild beast. He then chases Ino and her remaining son, Melikertes, off a cliff. Other tales relate Athamas' attempt to sacrifice Phrixus and Helle, his children by another wife, Nephele. While Aristophanes' choice of Athamas is undoubtedly designed to evoke the name of this wife, just before the arrival of the Cloud goddesses (Nephelai), Athamas' connections with the slaughter of infants in a Dionysiac context may also have recalled for the audience the tensions of the Korybantic/Kouretic ritual.³⁵

The other detail that may point to Dionysiac/Korybantic associations is Socrates' sprinkling Strepsiades with a fine powder (παιπάλη), rather than, as in the depictions of Herakles at Eleusis, purifying him with a liknon or torch. The scholiast explains that Socrates is grinding two stones together to produce this substance, which, like snow or fine-ground flour, whitens what it has been sprinkled on.³⁶ As Harrison (and others) have argued, this white powder recalls the *titanos*, the white gypsum or limestone with which, in some Dionysiac mysteries, the mystai are covered.³⁷ So too, as Harpocration tells us in his commentary explaining the rite Demosthenes claims was performed by Aischines' mother, the Titans coated themselves with gypsum when they slaughtered the infant Dionysos. Those who are mimetically enacting the myth in a ritual of purification for those about to be initiated do likewise.³⁸ The precise nature of Aischines' ritual has been debated, but Harpocration

³⁴ Hyginus (*Fabulae* 1-4) and ps. Apollodorus (*Library* 1.9.1) provide a good summary of the myths. Cp. Gantz 1993, pp. 176-180, for a discussion of the fragmentary evidence and the variants.

³⁵ The chorus of the Clouds, of course, does not resemble a chorus of Korybantic dancers, since Aristophanes has other jokes to make with this group of female divinities and can move freely from the parody of one type of ritual to another. See Byl 1994, pp. 47-8.

³⁶ scholiast ad Ar. Nub. 260 ταῦτα μὲν λέγων ὁ Σωκράτης λίθους περιτρίβων παρίνους καὶ κρούων πρὸς ἀλλήλους συναγαγὼν τὰ ἀπὸ τούτων θραύσματα βάλλει τὸν πρεσβύτερον αὐτοῖς καθάπερ τὰ ἱερεῖα ταῖς οὐλαῖς οἱ θύοντες. 262 καταπαττόμενος: τῇ χιόνι παττόμενος, ἐὰν αἱ Νεφέλαι διέλθωσιν. λέγεται δὲ "παιπάλη" τὸ λεπτοτάτον τοῦ ἀλεύρου· ἀφ' οὗ παλύνειν τὸ λευκαίνειν.

³⁷ Harrison 1991 (1903), pp. 491-493, 511-517. cp. West 1983, pp. 154-155, and his imaginative reconstruction of such a ritual, p. 163. cp. Nonnus XVII.228, XXVII.204, XXIX.274, XXXIV.144, XLVII.732. Harrison and West also refer to the Phokians' gypsum powder disguise in Herodotus VIII.27.

³⁸ Harpocration, *Lexicon in decem oratores Atticos* 48 'Απομάττων· Δημοσθένης ἐν τῷ ὑπὲρ Κτησιφῶντος. οἱ μὲν ἀπλοϊκώτερον ἀκούουσιν ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀποψῶν καὶ ἀπολυμαινόμενος, ἄλλοι δὲ περιεργότερον, οἷον

may not even be referring to the same ritual in his explanation. If Harpocraton is correct, however, some ritual existed in which the celebrants imitated the 'Titans' murder of Dionysos, at least to the extent of powdering their faces. The recurring jokes about the pale faces of the students at the Phrontisterion and the references to them as "earthborn" (γηγενεῖς) seem also to identify them with this class of figures, the gypsum-smeared band of wild men who threaten (or protect).³⁹

This argument should not be pressed too hard, since the links between ideas are too tenuous to bear much load. It would be unwise to conclude from this evidence that (1) Aristophanes is clearly mimicking a Korybantic *thronosis* and that (2) therefore this particular ritual included a sprinkling of gypsum powder to recall the mythic precedent of the 'Titans' murder of Dionysos. Nevertheless, the scene in Aristophanes evokes both the fearful initiand of Plato's Korybantic initiation and the sprinkled powder linked with the 'Titans' slaying of the infant god. Plato and Harpocraton are almost certainly talking about different rituals, and the *thronismos* mentioned in Dio may be as different from Plato's *thronosis* as the ritual Demosthenes attributes to Aischines is from Harpocraton's ritual. Nevertheless, all these rituals share certain similarities, just as the myths of the Korybantes, Kouretes, and 'Titans' resemble one another. That is not to say that they all shared the same ritual form, much less the same initiatory function, but Aristophanes could evoke the whole complex of associations for his audience with a just few details, and then play his jokes off the ideas.

This combination of similar features, the fear that the one attended to may be killed instead of protected and the purification by a sprinkled white powder instead of fire or water, not only is absent from the Eleusinian scene (either in the myth of Demeter's mourning or in the iconography of Herakles' initiation), but it also differs from the enthronement ceremony at the Trophonius oracle

περιπλάττων τὸν πηλὸν καὶ τὰ πίτυρα τοῖς τελουμένοις, ὡς λέγομεν ἀπομάττεσθαι τὸν ἀνδριάντα πηλῷ· ἡλειφον γὰρ τῷ πηλῷ καὶ τῷ πιτύρῳ τοὺς μουμένους, ἐκμιμούμενοι τὰ μυθολογούμενα παρ' ἐνίοις, ὡς ἄρα οἱ Τιτᾶνες τὸν Διόνυσον ἐλυμήναντο γύψῳ καταπλασάμενοι ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ γνώριμοι γενέσθαι. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν τὸ ἔθος ἐκλιπεῖν, πηλῷ δὲ ὕστερον καταπλάττεσθαι νομίμου χάριν. cp. Eustathius ad Il. II 735 §332 on *titanos* as the dust of gypsum - οἱ δὲ παλαιοὶ φασι τίτανος κόνις γύψος.

in Lebadeia, which Bonnechere has recently argued is the model for Strepsiades' initiation.⁴⁰ For the Trophonius oracle, Pausanias provides one of the most detailed descriptions of ritual practice in ancient Greek religion, and the procedure is clear. The petitioner is seated on the Throne of Memory only after his descent into Trophonius' oracle, and the purifications by water and by various abstentions come before the consultation, not while he is seated. Moreover, as terrifying as the consultation may be, there is no ambiguity about the status of the inquirer; sacrifices are performed daily in advance to check on the god's goodwill. The three types of enthronement, Eleusinian, Trophonian, and Korybantic, differ significantly in their form and nature, and it is the Korybantic *thronosis* that provides the best model for understanding Strepsiades' initiation into Socrates' Phrontisterion.

Thus, although the ritual act of sitting in a chair might be termed in English an "enthronement", regardless of whether the ritual is a Korybantic initiation, a Trophonian debriefing, or an Eleusinian purification, the terms *thronosis* or *thronismos* in Greek are much more restricted in their scope. In each case, the enthronement serves a different ritual function and is associated with different iconography and with different myths. The evidence for all of these rituals is scanty and perplexing, but it is therefore all the more important not to confuse the evidence for one with another in our attempts to reconstruct a coherent picture of each. If the evidence for the initiand's fear and confusion is imported from the Korybantic *thronosis* into the Eleusinian mysteries, the whole tenor of the preparatory purification is altered. Perhaps even more important is the issue of chronology, since the testimonies of, e.g., Aristophanes and Plato, cannot confirm that all types of

³⁹ *Clouds* 103, 119, 1112, 1171 - pale skin of the students; 853 - γηγενεῖς.

⁴⁰ Bonnechere 1998, pp. 456-9. Much more convincing is the idea that Socrates' questioning of Strepsiades on a bedbug-ridden mattress after the parabasis plays off the Throne of Memory at Lebadeia and the opposition there between Memory and Forgetfulness. Bonnechere restates his ideas with more emphasis on this second enthronement in Bonnechere 2003, pp. 173-5.

enthronement were familiar to their 5th and 4th century audiences, but only the particular rites to which they refer.

To sit in solemn silence, then, may have been a preparatory purification for the Eleusinian Mysteries, but this purification should not be confused with the ritual of *thronosis*, which belongs rather to the Korybantic type of mystery ritual, a dizzying dance around the awed and anxious initiand.

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* I would like to thank Barbara Gold and the editors at AJP for all their assistance, especially with procuring the images. I would also like to thank Kevin Clinton, Pierre Bonnechere, Edgar Andueza, and Elisabetta Matelli for their comments, suggestions, and critiques, although I need scarcely add that any infelicities, obscurities, or outright errors are wholly the products of my own ignorance, carelessness, or obstinacy.